



Puncturing needle phobia

Fear of needles can be hazardous to your health, but you can overcome it

BY KENYA MCCULLUM

My anxiety began the minute I woke up the morning of my appointment. Actually, that's not entirely accurate: My nerves began to tense up as soon as my doctor mentioned that she wanted me to take a blood test. Since I had already declined a flu shot and a tetanus shot (what are the chances of me actually getting tetanus, I rationalized), I thought I had dodged a bullet—or rather, a needle. You see, I have an extreme fear of needles, and just the thought of getting a shot or a blood test is enough to raise my blood pressure through the roof.

Needle phobia is hardly an exclusive club. In fact, medical professionals have seen it so frequently that in the early nineties, it earned a name in the DSM-IV: trypanophobia.

If you're like me, you get extremely nervous as soon as the tourniquet comes out, and there's a momentary spike in your blood pressure while you're getting a shot or having blood drawn. You clench your teeth and push through your fear. But in extreme cases, people with needle phobia have such an intense fear that they can't even force themselves to undergo any medical procedures that involve needles—which can be disastrous if they have conditions that require the use of needles for treatments that can improve their health, or even save their lives.

FIGHTING THE FEAR OF NEEDLES

The fear of needles can be a prickly pain that's very difficult to deal with. But the good news, says Dr. Larry Kubiak—a psychologist at Tallahassee Memorial